

THE ANSWER TO CHAOS¹

I

THE CHALLENGE TO INDIVIDUALITY

IN the heart of this blundering and disillusioned world is a deep, indefinable longing for something which will give it steadfastness. Bewilderment hangs like a sword upon the horizons of our lives. The growing twilight of confusion is casting gloom in our faces. Entangled by ennui, enmeshed by disillusion, caught in the fell clutch of despair, man is crying out today, "O that I knew where I might find Him." Desperately disillusioned, tragically ill-equipped, paralyzed by fear—that is the earmark of our time. The sight of faded hopes, scarred dreams, and vanished purposes has left us bewildered. Beneath the thin veneer of contemporary intellectual smugness is an appalling sense of frustration. We are beginning to fear that the very foundations of the universe are sagging and that its walls will tumble in about our heads. Unsatisfied with self-made gods, duped by his own genius, and tricked by his own philosophy, man today is turning his face to the stars, lifting the prayer, "God be merciful to me." We have been worshipping so long at the altar of self-sufficiency that the smoke of incense has blown into our faces and blinded our vision. H. G. Wells compares the world of today to a man who lives in a haunted house, lit up by many candles. One after another the candles are

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going out, leaving him in the despair of haunted darkness. Joseph Conrad described our day in his inimitable story, "The End of the Tether." You meet an old seafaring man sitting at the wheel of a boat, plowing through an angry storm. He is old and very feeble. Members of the crew urge him to relinquish his hold on the wheel, offering to take his place, but he refuses. There he sits, strapped to his wheel, in the teeth of a blinding storm, unwilling to let go, and yet, totally blind. So is the world of our time.

We seem to be like people who walk on streets which have no foundation, who eat food which does not nourish, who live in houses which do not shelter. We seem to be like sailors on sinking ships, climbing into the rigging, always above the water line, but never far from death. We seem to be like sleepers, conscious of the dawn, but unable to awaken. So many voices are crying out that we do not know what to believe or where the truth may be found. Life has become a theater of disappointment and frustration, flickering like a smoking lamp. Even faith itself is beginning to wilt and fade before the dreadful onslaught of this stark realism. Enterprises which began in poetry are ending in drab prose. Undertakings which were launched in high hope are buried under rivers of tears. Life no longer seems to make sense, while the universe has become meaningless, futile, and incoherent. What we supposed was an oasis is only a mirage, and what we thought were palm trees are only scarred rocks standing on the edge of hot and barren deserts. It is this galling sense of frustration which haunts our world today. In all the years of my ministry I have never been interviewed by so many people who have come to me to discuss the right of destroying themselves. No poet ever interpreted our age more clearly than Whittier when he wrote,

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
'Till all our strivings cease,
Take from our lives the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess,
The beauty of Thy peace.

Humanity is looking for a depth so deep, a height so inaccessible, and a distance so great that nothing can touch it.

Now this sense of frustration is beginning to create the ugly mood of self-pity. We seem to be like Elijah, sitting under a juniper tree, lifting the plaintive cry, "It is enough." The woods today are full of this horticultural lamentation. No one with his ear close to the ground can possibly deny that the ominous temper of the present is self-pity. We are beginning to feel sorry for ourselves. There is much whimpering about the hardness of life, as if anyone ever said it would be easy. We are full of complaints. The way is steep, the road is difficult, the trail is narrow, the stones are sharp, the storms pelt in our faces, and the wind is contrary. Many people one meets today are sure that the whole world is organized to defeat them. They are quite convinced that every man's hand is against them. They are sure that humanity is dedicated to the one end of rubbing them out. They think society has put aside all its hopes and responsibilities to eliminate them; the whole universe and God have entered into a great conspiracy to bring about their downfall. They had supposed that the world owed them a living and they would travel rose-lined paths to flowery beds of ease. Having found what a fatal error that was, they are overtaken with self-pity.

To put it simply: We are falling into a state of self-compassion. Sometimes, when you sit at a camp fire and have looked long into the flame and then suddenly look up into the sky, you are apt to conclude that everything is darker than it has ever been. So we have looked so long into the

flames of adversity that our vision is blurred and we are losing our perspective. We stand before the mirror, hypnotized by our own misery. We like to call ourselves martyrs and pin crepe on our arms. We only desire to tell our woes to anyone who will listen to them.

Now this martyr complex often crowds in upon the most sensible people. Sensitiveness is one of the finest qualities of the soul and one of the most beautiful traits of the good life. There is nothing nobler in character than to feel and to respond to need. But the danger is that it will create the miserable mood of self-pity. I do not mean to suggest that we must give no place to pity. The whole world is hungry for it. Humanity is waiting for the sunrise of those who will look upon its misery and woe in terms of compassionate understanding. But when pity turns in upon itself, it withers the very roots of life.

How can one explain this appalling unrest of today, with its terrifying sense of frustration and futility? What has brought it about? What has brought it into the open? Normally we live with a finer and more adventurous joy. When you try to untangle the twisted threads of the past and run your finger over the threads of yesterday you come upon many reasons for this break-up of faith. Many causes have produced the disillusionment which is so grim and real today. These causes are sometimes political, sometimes economic, sometimes social, sometimes intellectual, sometimes international. You cannot lay this temper of mind at the door of any one foible or failing. Many forces have gone into the making of our day.

But what is significant is that they seem to have a common focal point. All the anxiety, bitter disillusionment, and appalling fears seem to come to a head in a new world movement; it turns on the word "totalitarianism." Life for most

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people has become almost intolerable and unlivable because of the rise of a new ideology. The very foundations of the universe are being challenged with a fierceness and a ruthlessness beyond our imagination. A whole new way of life is coming to the fore, fiercely discarding and discrediting everything that has come before. It is popular to speak of it as the great revolution. It is not so much a new political technique as it is a new scheme for mankind. It is not a form of government, but a spirit. It is not so much a way of thinking as a way of living.

This so-called revolution proposes to set up an entire new attitude to history and to humanity. It rubs out all the importance and worth of personality. It makes mockery of living together for the common good. It reduces God to the position of a celestial bell hop who must do the bidding of the state. I do not propose to go into the details of this strange philosophy here. I only state it. Sometimes it expresses itself through communism, sometimes it takes the form of emperor worship, at other times it appears as fascism, and in another country it calls itself Naziism, but it is all one and the same. In some respects it is just a tangled mass of philosophies, opinions, and ideologies rolled up into a ball and called totalitarianism. There is in it the fatalism of Mohammed, the trickery of Machiavelli, the apocalyptic genius of Isaiah, the economic determinism of Karl Marx, the psychology of American advertising, the wily dream of Sir Thomas More, the banditry of the Saracen, and the Greek mythology of the Trojan horse. Otto Tolischus calls *Mein Kampf* ten per cent autobiography, ninety per cent dogma, and one hundred per cent propaganda. That strange bundle of bigotry and ideology has so gripped so many people in the world today that many believe it shall one day sweep across this whole earth and toss into oblivion the way

of life in which we believe. We are almost paralyzed by anxiety and alarm.

Indeed if that prevails—then Christianity may yet be obliterated from the earth. “Only a miraculous change, or a war which the Axis loses can save Christianity as well as Democracy.” They will rise or fall together.

On a memorable night of the late summer of 1914 a distinguished British gentleman and statesman, Sir Edward Grey, was sitting by the window of his library in his London residence. The address was 10 Downing Street. It was the night before the first world war had been declared. He knew what was in the offing, his people, and all people, and he had invited a few very intimate friends to share with him his anxiety. As they were talking together in the late afternoon, while a thick pea-soup London fog hung over the city, there passed by a lamplighter, with his little torch under his arm, walking to the corner of Downing Street to turn on the street lamp at the intersection. As he was walking by the window, Sir Edward Grey saw him and said to his friends, “The lights are going out all over the world tonight and we shall not see them relit in our generation.” He little knew the terrifying import of those words upon himself, because a little later he became blind. But he was speaking better than he knew of what mankind was destined to experience. This sentence of a British Minister of Foreign Affairs, often quoted today, is a picture of our time.

Now, in a way, it is a good thing that all this has come into the open. It is a wholesome experience sometimes to be challenged, to give an account of the faith that is in you. We have been altogether too casual about our fundamental political convictions. We have treated democracy like an old shoe and taken it for granted. Indeed, we have permitted it to be shorn of so many of its finer aspects that it

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has lost its glow and color. To many it is a hollow and empty thing. Until very recently it was thought very old-fashioned to stand up for it. A regimented, streamlined, straight-jacketed form of state socialism was supposed to be the new technique for building the kingdom of God on earth. International pink-eye has swept like an epidemic over the land. But suddenly we have been stabbed wide-awake by the tragedies of this earth, and we are discovering what happens to people when they lose the priceless heritage of freedom. We have come to see that when you rub out the way of life which is commonly called democracy, then life becomes meaningless and empty. There are always two dangers confronting democracy. In times of prosperity its supreme danger is arrogance, but in times of adversity its danger is cowardice. What we need today is to stand before the world to give a reason for the hope that there is in us. Many times one thinks of the vibrant voice of an ancient prophet, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet." In spite of all its foibles and failings, its inconsistencies and its compromises, its blunders and its disappointments, democracy as a way of life can stand before this world unashamed and unafraid.

At the very outset, then, may I make clear my own position and one which I trust you share with me. I said, a moment ago, that this movement of grim, stark force which is sweeping through the world is called a revolution. In reality it is not a revolution at all. It is a counter-revolution. It is not the stream of history, it is an attempt to block the stream of history. When a great movement has been born and lifted life to higher levels, sweeping along like some majestic river, enriching the waste and barren lands through which it runs, there always emerges sooner or later a cruel force which would halt its flow and cut off its life-giving

power. Before any great movement or ideal can triumph it must face some desperate last-ditch stand of entrenched wrong. It is so that I interpret the world of today. There came a day when, by the Providence of God, freedom began to flow through this earth like a golden river. In the Renaissance it was intellectual freedom; in the Reformation it was spiritual freedom; in the seventeenth century it was political freedom. But always freedom flowed on through the waste lands of earth converting them into rose-bearing and fruitful gardens. Its course is not yet run. There is still waste land which it must reclaim and transform. There are still deserts which must be converted into blooming gardens. But today a fierce Satanic force would halt the flow of that river. It is essentially a fantastic ideology, and a political skulduggery which was outmoded a thousand years ago. It is a counter-revolution, utterly ruthless, conscienceless, and unscrupulous. The dignity of man is faced by the blasphemy of race. The sovereignty of God is supplanted by the worship of state. In place of the cross we have a swastika. Racial omnipotence is God, dressed up in the garment of tribalism. It is the most callous parade of power the world has ever seen and the torch of freedom is flickering. But it is a counter-revolution. It is not the stream of time, but an attempt to block it. Believe me, Hitler is not history, but an incident in history. The world of tomorrow is in the hands of men who keep faith with freedom. This thing called totalitarianism is destined to have a savage epilogue because the fingers on the dial of God never move backward. It cannot prevail.

There is another observation I would like to make at the very outset. If democracy goes down to defeat, which God forbid, Christianity cannot long survive. The Christian teaching and civil liberties are wrapped up in the same basket.

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If freedom is to perish by the sword, then the Christian religion will have to go back to the catacombs. Let us make it quite clear that the Christian religion has a profound stake in the issues of this hour. I do not mean to suggest that Christianity and democracy are one and the same, although they have a strange way of synchronizing through history. Christianity does not advance any political technique or mode of government. But I do affirm that there is more Christian content in democracy than in the way of life which is pitted against it today. If democracy goes—let me repeat it carefully—Christianity cannot survive. For religion is not something which lives in a hermetically sealed compartment, set apart from all other expressions of life. Religion is a fountain which overflows into every area of life, economic, social, intellectual, moral, but also political. In the last analysis a man's religion will find expression in his concept of government. A man who is free in Christ will never permit himself or others to live in bondage and slavery. Let there be no mistaking of the issue. The Axis philosophy attacks both democracy and Christianity.

But how does totalitarianism challenge democracy and where, and what part can religion play in that conflict? Democracy rests upon three simple but profound convictions. It is a spiritual force which expresses itself through three distinct channels. If you were to analyze and reduce to an irreducible minimum the values which it affirms you would come upon these three. Democracy is what a man thinks about himself, what a man thinks about others, and what a man thinks about God. It presupposes an attitude to the individual, to society, to religion. These, I take it, are the three fundamental convictions upon which democracy rests. Now it is very significant that these are the same three fundamental principles of education. An educated

man in the highest sense of the term is one who has a high sense of personal initiative, a passionate feeling of social responsibility, and a deep spiritual discernment. He has a sense of independence, interdependence, and dependence; self-reverence, compassion, and communion; wisdom, understanding, and reverence. But what is still more significant is that Christianity is also interpreted in and rests upon these same three fundamental postulates. The Christian religion begins by affirming that man is a child of God, or, as Kepler has it, "I think Thy thoughts after Thee, O God." He is made in the image of his Creator. But while Christianity may begin with the individual, it does not end there. Christianity also implies social consciousness. Christianity is not a lonely pilgrimage of a lonely soul on a lonely road to a lonely God, but a sharing of the highway with all mankind in which we live together for the common good. It affirms forever and forever that if a man is a child of God he must look out upon the world and say to all men everywhere, "We are brothers." And, too, Christianity rests upon the profound conviction that spirituality stands at the very center of the universe. God is the focal point of history, a God of love who stands in the heart of the universe. These are the three fundamental irreducible essentials of the Christian religion. Or if I may put it in another way, a Christian is one who can look within himself and say, "I am a child of God"; he can look without and say, "We are brothers"; he can look up and say, "God is my Father." It is quite clear, therefore, that Christianity has a stake in the issues of this day. It is the fountain source of the glory and power of democracy. An attack upon the latter is to declare war on the former. That is the significance of the issues of this hour.

May I then in these three lectures think with you about

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these three irreducible and fundamental convictions of democracy, which the Christian religion vindicates, and which totalitarianism rejects?

Democracy begins by affirming the worth and the dignity of personality. It can survive only so long as the individual is held important. Democracy springs from a deep and unshakable faith in human personality, a high estimate of individuality. It trusts people, trusts their thinking, their judging. It has confidence in people. Totalitarianism will say that is madness. Yet democracy, blessed by God, has faith in people. In no other area, therefore, will you find the cleavage so sharp between democracy and the Axis philosophy. Dictators herd people like sheep, treat them like slaves, deal with them as cogs in a wheel, coercing them by pressure. Human beings are reduced to mere atoms of protoplasm. Man is nobody.

But democracy maintains man has a capacity of balancing argument, discriminating between chaff and wheat. And that has a profound implication. Democracy is often spoken of as the rule of the majority. But in dictatorship, in Russia, Germany, Italy, and Japan, you also have the rule of the majority. No, the amazing and priceless thing about democracy is not the emphasis on the rule of the majority but the right of the minority. The individual never loses his significance.

In totalitarianism you have the state holding in its hand all political, economic, social, and moral power. The next inevitable step after that is the destruction of opposition to that power, the denial of freedom of speech, and the utter disregard of civil liberty. The person does not count.

The government is absolute and final. Agreement is reached by obedience, not by consent. The people have no constitutional rights, either legal or political. The rulers are

not subject to constitutional check. Herman Rauschnig quotes Hitler as saying, "To the Christian doctrine of the infinite significance of the individual human soul and of personal responsibility, I oppose with icy clarity the saving doctrine of the nothingness and insignificance of the individual human being. Therefore, we must put an end to universal education. Universal education is the most corroding and disintegrating poison that liberalism has ever invented."

J. O. Hetzler in *Sociology and Social Research* (p. 119) describes it as follows: "Finally, all expressions of individuality are controlled, and this means that individuality is suppressed, for the very essence of individuality is its spontaneity and freedom of expression. In a dictatorship the individual must give up his own personality and become the 'puppet of a ventriloquist' or to use another figure, he must submit to the 'hug of a boa constrictor.' In summary, the very capacities for government and free full life become atrophied."

In totalitarianism the individual exists for the state; in democracy the state exists for the individual. In totalitarianism man is a pawn, but in democracy man has a place. In totalitarianism the state is of first importance; in democracy the individual is of primary concern. In totalitarianism man forfeits the right of personal judgment, personal initiative, conscience, morals, and religion. He has no value save in terms of the state. The individual is justified in any procedure or conduct if thereby the state is made stronger. The individual is to be repudiated if by his conduct he hinders the state from triumph, however nefarious that triumph may be. Indeed, in totalitarianism individual conscience does not exist. There is no such thing as right and wrong. All matters of conduct turn on the advantage or disadvan-

tage to the state. These are the two violently contradictory attitudes to the individual. I do not have to point out how mutually exclusive they are. They cannot live peacefully side by side in the same world. Either the first triumphs and the second goes down to defeat, or the second prevails and the first is defeated. Hitler in *Mein Kampf* maintains that democracy is an outmoded form of government because statesmen have to go to the people for approval, when the people are incompetent to pass judgment. Robert MacIver in *Leviathan and the People* writes: "The regimentation of opinion is no incidental character of dictatorship. It belongs to its very essence. It is the primary function of the whole system. It is the principle on which alone dictatorship can rest . . ." (p. 52). "Dictatorship is the sworn enemy of the freedom of thought and of discussion which is the breath of all intellectual life" (p. 56). Democracy, on the other hand, is built upon the fundamental postulate that each individual has his right and that each citizen has worth. It goes its way singing, "The people, Lord, the people, not thrones, not crowns, but men." It maintains that a government is only as strong as its humblest citizen and that each citizen must play his part and take his place in the maintenance of freedom.

Now what democracy has made its first principle, written into the bill of rights, is the fundamental postulate of the Christian religion. It is written into the very warp and woof of our faith. Christianity gave that to the world. To the ancient Greek only that man counted who could think. To the Babylonian only that man counted who could trade. To the Roman only that man counted who had power. Then came Jesus of Nazareth who saw in the most humble and obscure a grandeur and a glory great enough to rebuild and redeem the world. He saw buried splendors in every life

great enough to bring in a new day and a new world. In the Kingdom of God of which he was always speaking, man, therefore, came before the machine, and personality before profit. Man was of more value than many sheep and had greater worth than all the piled-up wealth of the ages. And notice the kind of people to whom He said that. They were, for the most part, ignorant and illiterate men. They did not have one-tenth of the culture, the background, the tradition, the talent that you have. They had the smell of fish in their clothing. They were crude and up-country folk. The so-called important people looked down their noses at them. They were considered unfortunate waste and by-product in the manufacture of so-called greatness. These were the people Jesus used to redeem the world. He took a despised tax collector—never a popular man—and made him the writer of the first gospel. He took a will-o'-the-wisp Peter and established through him the Church. He took a cynical bigot and made him the evangel-bearer of the gospel of universal love. He saw value in the individual and recognized the worth of personality. As a matter of fact, what we call the Kingdom of God is, in reality, the kingdom of self-respect.

It is so that the Christian faith answers the challenge to democracy. Not in the superman of Nietzsche, nor yet in the materialistic automaton of Karl Marx, but in the conception of man as a child of God rests the hope of the world.

Through the centuries history has indicated that adventurous faith in mankind. It is a simple but often forgotten fact that the progress of the world rests upon the influence of its obscure people. In the building of a new order God has an ironic way of passing by governments and turning to inconspicuous citizens. God is never tricked by noise or blinded by sparkle. The obscure have become the indis-

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pensable builders of a new day. The hope of any age rests upon the fidelity of those who day by day, patiently, uncomplainingly, do the work of the world. The unrecognized and unhonored people are always the hope of the ages. Believe me, something goes out of a civilization which loses its faith in common people. There is something regrettable about the drift of a world to its leaders rather than to all its citizens. It is so easy to exaggerate the importance of important people and to underestimate the power of the inconspicuous person. The greatest and most abiding forces are not found among the spectacular, the unusual, or the extraordinary. Just as hurricanes may make the headlines, although the dew does more good; just as the waves breaking on the rocks may make more noise, though the silent tides accomplish more, so the hope of the world rests not in its self-appointed, papier-mâché messiahs building their lath and plaster Utopias, but rather in the everyday people. The world would soon disintegrate but for the fidelity and loyalty of the people. It is this profound conviction which Christianity proclaims unashamed, and it is upon this conviction that democracy will prevail. The Kingdom of God is the kingdom of self-respect.

Only when democracy recovers its faith in people will a new day come. There are four factors which have made our American life. They are: the home, the church, the school, and the state. Of these four, the state is least essential, least important, and least indispensable. To be sure, the first three have often abrogated their duty and responsibility. It is also true that the fourth, the state, has allocated to itself and assumed the duties and the responsibilities of the home, the church, and the school. But you don't solve the problem of mankind by putting what is least essential into first place. A new world will never come and democracy will

not survive save only as there comes a re-emphasis upon the worth of personality and the importance of the individual.

So long as there are homes to which men turn at close of day,
So long as there are homes where children and women stay,
If love and loyalty and faith be found across these sills
A stricken nation can recover from its gravest ills.
So long as there are homes where fires burn and there is bread
So long as there are homes where lamps are lit and prayers are said
Although a stricken people falters in the night and nations grope
With God Himself back of these little homes we still can hope.

It is to this fundamental philosophy that we must cling, a philosophy which will have its day of vindication. At least one answer to chaos is the recovery of the importance of the individual and the worth of personality.